

Joe Houser – Buck Knives (Retired) April 2021

[Creating Collectibles: The Joe Houser Story - The Buck Journal \(buckknives.com\)](https://www.buckknives.com)



Joe did not grow up familiar with Buck Knives, like many, he knew it as a generic knife term. Any knife could be a “Buck knife.” His one experience with a Buck was a 110 Folding Hunter he obtained through a friend. He then let another friend borrow it, a friend who unabashedly broke the tip off.

The Buck story became known to Joe in 1984 when he was introduced to Maralee Buck through a mutual friend at church. When meeting her, he recalls Buck Knives came to mind and he asked, “So your daddy makes knives?” “Yes, yes he does,” responded Maralee. A double date playing mini golf was their date and merely two weeks later, Joe proposed.

Always a gentleman, Joe did ask her father, Chuck Buck who was the Buck Knives President at the time, for Maralee’s hand. He was asked to wait a year before marrying her. “Chuck said he wanted to talk it over with his wife, Lori, and they came back and told me that if I loved Maralee, we could wait a year to marry. And, that’s what we did,” said Joe.

Joe began his 36-year career at Buck Knives in January of 1985, a month before he and Maralee married. “I had no plans to work at Buck Knives, but during our engagement Chuck asked me how I intended to support his daughter. I told him I was planning to move to Oregon and become a game warden. Chuck told me that was a Joe had no idea what an Industrial Engineer was supposed to do. His role before Buck Knives was as an iron worker. Although trained as an engineer by Chuck and other Buck employees, Joe discovered he had a natural interest in the history of Buck Knives and Buck products.

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He slid into his role as Historian after the need was created by some internal changes and the interest created by the Buck Knives Collector’s Club (BCCI), an external organization of Buck Knives enthusiasts and collectors, which had gained a nice following. “My own curiosity and the frequent questions on product history led me to start collecting and cataloguing information on the family, company and products.”

Joe’s dedication to capturing all of Buck’s history is ongoing. When Ebay gained credibility, Joe began purchasing old catalogs, signage, memorabilia and historical products for his archives. He

now has the most complete catalog collection, dating back to the 1940's. This historical aspect of his new role led him to knife collecting. "Initially I was obsessed with Buck axes and had collected nearly all of them, some dating back to the 1940s. My wife though, is very passionate about the handmade, fixed blades made by her grandpa and great grandpa." Smiling fondly, he recounts, "After my poor decision to display my axes over her fixed blade collection at the Blade Show some years ago, I ended up selling most of my axes and now focus on her favorite historical family knives." A decision he has never regretted.

Knife collecting then led him to knife making. For around 20 years now, Joe has been hand making custom knives. So much so, he's developed a severe allergy to the glue used and his hands were nearly rendered unusable. "I remember being up all night, unable to sleep because my hands were itching so terribly." Now clad in gloves, Joe is still at it. will admit, the gloves have made the detail work much more challenging, but I've worked through it."

Joe originally began building knives so he could use the commission he earned from them to buy more for his collection. His passion for the work and knowledge of what collectors look for, quickly made his items highly sought after in the knife community. "Although I enjoyed creating custom pieces, I never actually considered myself a custom knife maker until Wilde Bill Cody validated one of my creations."

Having always admired the work of long time Buck Knives custom knife maker, Wilde Bill Cody, Joe would often show Cody his designs and collaborate on how to perfectly finish a knife. "There was this day, a very big day for me when I showed Wilde Bill a 120 General from the 1970s I had rebuilt with copper and nickel silver finger guards and a stag handle. He looked at my 120, smiled, and said, 'Now you are a knife maker.'"

Creating collectibles is Joe's passion and he has always been awestruck by the loyal Buck following. Chuck Buck is his inspiration when making knives. "His sincerity, heartfelt behavior and kindness impressed me from the beginning. He was an amazing father-in-law and mentor." When working on a new knife, Joe does two things as a ritual. First he prays for help to **make sure** it's a good knife. When finished he asks himself what Chuck would think. "Would Chuck think this is done? Would he like it? If I can answer yes to those questions, I know its a good knife."

MORE ABOUT JOE

When not working or making knives, Joe enjoys hunting. Hunting for huckleberries, morel mushrooms, bear, deer, turkey and elk. He recalls where he took his first big bull elk, "Hank" and visits the spot often, grateful for the meat and the experience. Once an avid runner, Joe ran the 87.3 mile loop around Lake Coeur d' Alene in Idaho, where he resides. It took 19 hours and 47 minutes. Having since hung up his running shoes, Joe is approaching retirement where he will look for more ways to be outdoors. Joe and Maralee have been married for 36 years and have two sons — Aaron 33 and Andy 30. 1-Es favorite standard production knives are the 192 Buck Zipper and the 172 TNT a Buck/Mayo knife, which he's lost twice now in the woods. Chuck Buck once gifted him another 172 with a birthday inscription on the blade, a blade Joe treasures and wouldn't dare carry into the woods.

Soon after meeting Maralee, the first knife he obsessed over was the 639 Fieldmate, a knife tied into the Buckmaster family of knives. He recalls having to have it, asking production weekly if one was ready for him. Since then his favorite knife to customize has been the 184 Buckmaster. Now Joe and Maralee's collection features over 100 of the knives that Hoyt and Al Buck built in the 40s and 50s.

By Stephanie Young, Staff Writer
